

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 COA-01 DLOS-03 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01

FEA-01 OES-03 INT-05 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 /081 W

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R 301000Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5627

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 0568

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, BG, IN, US

SUBJ: INDO-BANGLADESH MARITIME BOUNDARY: POSITIONS HARDEN

REF: DACCA 163

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH INDIAN DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER J. N. DIXIT ON JANUARY 29, EMBOFF TOLD THAT JANUARY 14-18 NEW DELHI MEETING OF INDIAN AND BENGALIEE DELEGATIONS, LED BY RESPECTIVE FOREIGN SECRETARIES, ACHIEVED NOTHING. RATHER, BENGALIEE POSITION APPEARS TO HAVE GROWN MORE RIGID, SAYS DIXIT, AND ONLY POSITIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS MORE CORDIAL TONE OF DISCUSSIONS.

2. DIXIT WENT ON TO SAY THAT RESPECTIVE POSITIONS OF INDIA AND BANGLADESH VERY MUCH AT ODDS. HE SHOWED EMBOFF CHART ON WHICH BOUNDARY ASSERTED BY BANGLADESH ON BASIS TEN FATHOM BASE LINE AND BOUNDARY WHICH USE OF MEDIAN LINE WOULD GIVE INDIA REVEAL VERY SUBSTANTIAL OVERLAP. DIXIT ADDED THAT BANGLADESH LINE COMES AT ONE POINT WITHIN 3.5 MILES OF INDIAN SOIL (APPARENTLY AN ISLAND IN THE SUNDARBANS).

3. DIXIT THEN SAID THAT WITH SEISMIC SURVEY BY ASHLAND OIL ABOUT
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TO BEGIN, NEED FOR RESOLUTION TAKES ON GREAT URGENCY. HE IS NOT

AT ALL CERTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT BANGLADESH FEELS IT IS IN A POSITION TO COMPROMISE. (DIXIT SAID THAT AT CLOSE OF ONE DAY'S SESSION IN NEW DELHI, INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY KEWAL SINGH HANDED BENGALLEES A MAP OF BAY OF BENGAL AND INVITED THEM TO DRAW A LINE WHICH WOULD REPRESENT THEIR IDEA OF WHAT A COMPROMISE SHOULD BE, ADDING THAT INDIANS WOULD ACCEPT THIS; WHEN THE DELEGATIONS RECONVENED, THE BENGALLEES HAD DONE NOTHING.) HE OPINED OPINED BENGALLEES CLEARLY FEEL THEMSELVES BOUND BY LINE THEY ANNOUNCED LAST APRIL (SEE DACCA 1777 OF 1974), ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY HAVE GRANTED OIL EXPLORATION RIGHTS ON ITS BASIS. IN ADDITION, HE VOICED BELIEF THAT PRESIDENT MUJIBUR RAHMAN IS NOT BEING GIVEN GOOD ADVICE ON THIS ISSUE; DIXIT SAID HE HAS HEARD FOREIGN SECRETARY FAKHRUDDIN AHMED WAS OVERLY SANGUINE ABOUT RESULTS OF NEW DELHI MEETING WHEN BRIEFING MUJIB, AND LEFT IM-

PRESSION INDIANS WILL BE MORE FORTHCOMING THAN IS PRESENTLY INTENDED.

4. DIXIT SAID GOI IS HOPEFUL THAT ASHLAND OIL WILL HOLD OFF FROM SURVEY IN DISPUTED AREA PENDING SETTLEMENT. HE ADDED THAT IT MAY WELL PROVE THAT PORTION OF AREA WHERE ASHLAND HAS BEEN GIVEN EXPLORATION RIGHTS BY BDG IS INDIAN, AND THAT GOI IS WELL AWARE OF PROBLEM THIS MAY POSE TO BENGALLEES. SAYING THAT HE SPOKE WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION, DIXIT SAID THAT SENIOR WORKING LEVEL IN MEA ARE URGING THAT GOI AGREE TO COMPENSATE BDG FOR ANY SUMS IT MAY BE REQUIRED TO REFUND TO ASHLAND AS A RESULT OF REDUCTION IN AREA AVAILABLE FOR EXPLORATION.

5. BEFORE LEAVING ISSUE OF MARITIME BOUNDARY, DIXIT SAID THAT ONLY SOLUTION LIES IN A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT BY PRINCE OF INDIA AND PRESIDENT MUJIB. THIS SAME VIEW HAD BEEN VOICED PREVIOUS DAY BY KAISER MURSHED, MFA DIR-GEN FOR SUBCONTINENT. HOWEVER, IN DISCUSSING NEW DELHI MEETING, MURSHED HAD VOICED NONE OF THE URGENCY WHICH MARKED CONVERSATION WITH DIXIT. HE CONTENTED SELF WITH SAYING OFFICIALS (AND PARTICULARLY THE LAWYERS) HAD DONE ABOUT AS MUCH AS THEY COULD, AND NOW IT WAS UP TO THEIR POLITICAL MASTER AND MISTRESS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE.

6. AS MEMCONS ALREADY POUCHED NEA/PAB REVEAL, THE GOI HAS ASKED THE CARLSBERG GROUP OF OIL COMPANIES, WHO HOLD AN OFFSHORE OIL CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPLORATION CONCESSION FROM INDIA NEXT TO BANGLADESH WATERS, TO LIMIT THEIR SEISMIC ACTIVITIES TO WATERS WHICH ARE INDISPUTABLY INDIAN, I.E., TO THE AREA WEST OF THE BDG OFFSHORE BOUNDARY CLAIM. THE GOI HAS ASKED THE BDG TO MAKE A COMPARABLE REQUEST OF ASHLAND.

THE BDG TOLD THE INDIANS THAT IT DIDN'T THINK THIS STEP NECESSARY

AT THIS EARLY STAGE.

7. ASHLAND'S DACCA REP, MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN, STATED FLATLY JANUARY 20 TO EMBOFF THAT NO SUCH BDG REQUEST TO LIMIT ITS SURVEY WORK HAD BEEN MADE OF HIS FIRM. INDEED, IN EARLIER CONVERSATIONS WPTH PETROBANGLA OFFICIALS, O'SULLIVAN (THE ONLY ASHLAND OFFICER IN BANGLADESH) HAD DELIBERATELY RAISED THE ISSUE AND AFTER SOME EMBARRASSED RETICENCE, WAS INFORMED BY CHAIRMAN HABIBUR RAHMAN THAT ASHLAND SHOULD CONTINUE TO EXPLORE ITS FULL CONCESSION AREA UNLESS AND UNTIL THE BDG ADVISED OTHERWISE.

8. COMMENT: INDIAN DHC'S ACCOUNT RAISES CLEAR POSSIBILITY OF FORMAL GOI REQUEST TO USG TO URGE ASHLAND TO LIMIT ITS EXPLORATION TO AREA EAST OF LINE CLAIMED BY GOI. WHILE WE BELIEVE INDIAN SUGGESTION TO BDG IS EMINENTLY SENSIBLE, WE URGE USG CONTINUE TAKE POSITION OF OBSERVING WITH INTEREST PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THIS IMPORTANT OUTSTANDING QUESTION BETWEEN NEIGHBORING STATES WITHOUT, AT THIS STAGE, BEING DRAWN INTO MATTER FURTHER.
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